

critical digest

VOL. III No. 25

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

Razzle Dazzle-Arena, 2/19/51. New musical revue with lyrics and sketches by Mike Stewart, music by Leo Schumer and others. Edward Reveaux staged the musical in the round. Produced by Derrick Lynn-Thomas and David Heilweil...The High Ground-46th Street Theatre, 2/20/51. Albert H. Rosen presents Charlotte Hastings melodrama featuring Margaret Webster, Tom Helmore and Leueen MacGrath. Directed by Herman Shumlin.

Digests of Current Reviews - more on back page

Ti-Cog-Broadhurst, 2/9/51-2/10/51. In spite of favorable split decision from daily critics, Shuberts and Fridolin closed French-Canadian production after third performance. All of the reviewers praised unique acting ability of star, writer and director; though his other talents were not as highly commended. Outright "cons" were filed by critics of Times; Herald Tribune, News and Post. Atkinson, Times, did admit first half of the play was disarming in its sincerity and originality. Remainder of dissenters found too many dull spots in script, plus an almost complete lack of direction on Fridolin's part. Supporting cast headed by Clement Latour received many fine compliments. Hawkins, WT&S, enjoyed the production for its great humanity, glowing warmth, and its tough, sharp way of making points and building characters. McClellan, Journal American, hopes the cast returns in a better play. Sheaffer, Eagle, and others felt the build-up of the triple threat star was justified, though his script contained obvious faults. Coleman, Mirror, recommended show for special audience. Dash, Women's Wear, found some of the actors difficult to understand. Play, in English and French versions, ran over 2000 performances in Canada.

Billy Budd-Biltmore, 2/10/51. Widely diverse critical opinions greeted Chandler Cowles & Anthony B. Farrell's production of Louis O. Coxe and Robert Chapman's adaptation of the Melville novel. Times, Post, WT&S, Eagle and Newark News appraisers okayed entire production for providing an absorbing, memorable evening. They viewed script as a symbolic morality play pointing out an important message of good and evil. First class portrayals of Dennis King, Torin Thatcher and Charles Nolte in the cast were praised, along with intelligent direction of Norris Houghton. But dissenters viewed script as silly, unrealistic melodrama. Chapman, News, billed it as a tragic H.M.S. Pinafore. Majority felt first act was most effective, while Pollock, Compass thought third act the best. McCord, Herald Tribune, blamed play's failure on director.

Not For Children-Coronet, 2/13/51. Unanimous panning received by Playwrights' Company production of Elmer Rice's comedy which features Elliott Norton, J. Edward Bromberg and Betty Field. Pun on title was used by almost every critic. Atkinson, Times, claimed that play was not for adults, fish, flesh, fowl nor good red herring either. McClellan, Journal American and Pollock, Compass, qualified this, suggesting that maybe children might enjoy it. All agreed good cast was completely wasted on script Rice originally wrote in 1934. Watts, Post, further blamed author for being unfunny and dated in his satire. Coleman, Mirror, did admit he enjoyed a scant act that was in true Pirandello spirit, but the rest was only a muddled charade.

Editorial Pros & Cons

NBC must be congratulated for promoting a large variety of radio and television programs that appeal to theatre fans. But there is no reason why they should be competing with themselves for the available audience. The night of March 4th listeners can tune on Theatre Guild production of Hamlet, or look at telecast honoring Richard Rodgers. In a case like this two heads would really be better than one.

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 ' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '
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Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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| 1. NY Times | 11. Women's Wear Daily | 21. Freeman |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonwealth |
| 3. NY News | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 14. George Jean Nathan | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass | 15. Ward Morehouse | 25. Sat. Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post | 16. Morning Telegraph | 26. Newsweek |
| 7. NY Journal American | 17. Variety | 27. Time |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard | 28. Nation |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 19. Theatre Arts | 29. New Republic |
| 10. Newark News | 20. New Leader | 30. New Yorker |

- ANGEL IN THE PAWNSHOP-Booth, 1/18/51. Pro: 3-6-8-10-11-12-13-18-30. Con: 1-2-4-5-7-9-15-17-23-26-27.
- AFFAIRS OF STATE-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30. Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29.
- BLESS YOU ALL-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 1-5-10-11-14-15-17-18-22-27-29.
- BELL, BOOK AND CANDLE-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-6-15-17-19-20-21-22.
- CALL ME MADAM-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 23 votes. So-So: 3. Con: 18-19-28-29.
- THE COCKTAIL PARTY-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. So-So: 14. Con: 1-8-12-20-22-25-29.
- THE COUNTRY GIRL-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30.
- DARKNESS AT NOON-Booth, 1/13/51. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-10-11-15-18-20-27-30. Con: 1-14-17-22-24-26-29. So-So: 5-12-13-23.
- GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 21 votes. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. Con: 6-28.
- GUYS AND DOLLS-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 28. None: 16-21.
- THE HAPPY TIME-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 20 votes. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30.
- KISS ME KATE-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.
- THE LADY'S NOT FOR BURNING-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 22 votes. So-So: 17-30. Con: 3-11-29.
- THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 25 votes. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30.
- OUT OF THIS WORLD-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-10-11-13-23-29-30. Con: 1-3-9-12-17-18-19-20-22-24-26-27. So-So: 2.
- PEEP SHOW-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-9-10-13-15-16-18-23. So-So: 3-12-17. Con: 1-2-11-14-19-26-27-28-29-30.
- THE ROSE TATTOO-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Pro: 1-2-3-5-9-10-11. Con: 4-6-7. So-So: 8.
- SEASON IN THE SUN-Cort, 9/28/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 9-11-20-24-28. So-So: 10.
- SECOND THRESHOLD-Morosco, 1/2/51. Pro: 1-2-3-6-7-8-10-11-12-22-25-26-30. Con: 4-9-13-14-17-18-23-27-28.
- SOUTH PACIFIC-Majestic, 4/8/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-6-7-8-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-24-25-26-30. Con: 27. So-So: 23.
- TWENTIETH CENTURY-Fulton, 12/24/50. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 5-24-28. None: 4-12-14-15-19-21-25.

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' Green Room Department '

REVIEWER'S ROLE...A drama reviewer is a "taster" who goes to the theatre with the idea of representing the discriminating ticket buyer states Coe, Washington Post. As the bridge between the theatre world and the public he must be physically healthy and mentally alert. The job demands constant background reading. It means the writer must have opinions and not be afraid of changing them. Ideally he likes to nap before going to a play, a clean shirt, and a non-sleep begetting dinner which puts him in his seat five minutes before curtain time.

ADVICE TO HOPEFULS...A room, a budget, a durable wardrobe, a thick hide, a pair of brass knuckles and a rich uncle are prime requisites for any young person hoping to crash Broadway, insists Burr, Playbill.

ENGLISH VIEW...New Yorkers of all classes seem to be theatre conscious to an extent and intelligence unknown in London surmises Mortlock, Stage, after a visit. The reviews of Atkinson, Barnes, Chapman and Gibbs seem to be widely read and discussed, while discussion of movies seems to be at a minimum.

COLUMN TIPS...Darkness At Noon will win the Critics' Circle Award, whispers Winchell who has a tip from a "secret poll"...Bootleg records of Call Me Madam are selling fast in Philadelphia, hears Kilgallen...There will be no price ceiling on theatre tickets repeats Lyons.

BOUGHT CRITICS...The case of the bought drama critics who didn't know it was reported by Sylvester, News. Inexperienced producer, he claims, insisted that critics could be fixed, and a veteran Broadway hustler agreed to see to it for a ten per cent share in the play. When the show got only two fair reviews, the latter returned the agreement. The hustler couldn't lose, if the critics praised the show he would have won a ten per cent share of a hit.

TV A HIT...TV has a future, admits Coleman, Mirror. He is grateful to the new medium for providing handsome wages for so many players, writers and technicians from the theatre while they are waiting for another show. But after a full day of viewing, he is glad to get back to Broadway and real live actors.

CBS INVESTIGATES...CBS Views the Press turned spotlight on Guys and Dolls story in Leonard Lyons syndicated column. Item claimed that an old man, when informed that he couldn't get tickets to the hit until November, retorted "I should live so long." Program discovered after calls to box office that November tickets are not yet on sale.

BEAUTIFUL CRITIC...Former World Telegram critic Burton Rascoe, newly named literary editor of American Legion magazine, spoke up for good looks of George Jean Nathan in an exchange of letters, reprinted in NY Times Book Review. Actually Rascoe thinks Nathan is handsomer than Ronald Colman.

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' Theatre News Round Up '

Shows that closed include Ti-Coq, The Green Bay Tree, Jotham Valley...Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, resigned. Otis Guernsey has been named motion picture critic and will cover major theatre openings pending appointment of a drama critic... Variety revealed that top daily critic showed up "in distress" at Billy Budd opening; management requested second string reviewer's criticism be printed...Ashworth Burlem, Wilmington Journal, will have his There Are No Islands play produced by Wilmington Drama League May 10th...Ashton Stevens, Chicago Herald American, on the mend...John Sherman, Minneapolis Tribune, in town visiting the plays...Whitney Bolton, Morning Telegraph, featured on WFDR FM quiz "You Can't Scare Us"...NBC planning "Column of Air" feature alternating 15 minute evening broadcasts with Earl Wilson, Danton Walker, Werd Morehouse and Inez Robb..."Show News Weekly" trade paper planned by John Alden Talbot and Huntington Hartford...NBC-TV planning eight week summer series on history of the theatre...Astral Edition photos on display at Abbey Chop House.

' Interview Hi-Lights '

VINTON FREEDLEY...Broadway producer now presenting ANTA's TV "Showtime USA" hopes that the various plans to place living theatre in the nation's movie houses are successful, he told Creelman, WT&S. Because most stage stars, with the exception of the Lunts, refuse to tour; they are not generally known outside of New York. Thus his sponsor of the TV show insists that movie stars be used on the program designed to promote the theatre.

JOSEPH SCHILDKRAUT...The Green Bay Tree lead believes TV is missing its opportunity to develop on its own. The medium, he said on WCBS Margaret Arlen, must develop its own techniques not copy those of the theatre or the motion pictures.

KAY CARLETON...Rehearsal Club director explained how the haven for stage-minded young women coming to NY operates to Morehouse, WT&S. The clubhouse provides room and board to 45 girls for \$17 per week. Founded in 1913 it has been the home of many young actresses while they were getting started on their careers. At present many of the girls are employed on Broadway, TV or in part time jobs.

' Digests of Current Reviews '

The Rose Tattoo-Martin Beck, 2/3/51. Add five "pros" and one "con" from weekly critics for Tennessee Williams' new play. Reviewers admitted play was uneven in direction and writing, but high level of acting plus many moving scenes made them recommend the play. Top honors continued to be claimed by Maureen Stapleton, with Eli Wallach and the rest of the cast close behind. Director Daniel Mann received his share also. Hobe, Variety, considers play one of the theatre's most provocative, and thinks it shows hope of new vistas for the author. Gabriel, Cue, who praised show did feel that some of the scenes stretched "good taste" to the testing point. Dissenter was Time critic who thought script was typical Williams' product that was too often lush and decadently primitive. He called it "A Banana Truck Named Desire".

The Green Bay Tree-Golden, 2/1/51-2/17/51. Newsweek and trade paper critics found Mordaunt Shairp's play, as revived by Shepard Traube, still absorbing theatrical fare, though each had minor reservations. Francis, Billboard, thought much of the sting of the original theme had disappeared. Hobe, Variety, didn't think Traube's direction was smooth enough, while Newsweek critic thought Frances Compton was only one who really knew what script was about. Remainder of critics panned script, acting and direction. Gibbs, New Yorker, laid part of the blame on set designer Raymond Sovey for presenting the entirely wrong kind of rooms. Denhelm Elliott and Anne Crawford rated more praise than Joseph Schildkraut who was condemned for misinterpreting his role.

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/51. Shipley, New Leader, didn't like Alfred de Liagre's production of Philip Barry's last play for two reasons. The theme of the script, as revised by Robert E. Sherwood, is not fully thought out, while both the writing and the acting seem to emanate from the head rather than the heart.

' Legit Stuff '

Macy's special Valentine for 1951 was delivered via full page newspaper ads to Gloria Swanson...WNEW to syndicate Shakespearean disc jockey show emceed by Jose Ferrer...Six tunes from Out of the World have been banned on radio...NY State Senate okayed \$1.00 price fee for theatre ticket brokers, bill now goes to Assembly...Kurt Weill concert repeated in Town Hall...Plans for open air theatre season for NY next summer readied by Basil Langton.

